

Managing Difficult Behavior

1. **BEHAVIOR:**

Rambling -- wandering around and off the subject. Using far-fetched examples or analogies.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Refocus attention by restating relevant point
- Direct questions to group that is back on the subject
- Ask how topic relates to current topic being discussed
- Use visual aids, begin to write on board, turn on overhead projector
- Say: "Would you summarize your main point please?" or "Are you asking...?"
- You are only allowed two "What ifs."

2. **BEHAVIOR:**

Shyness or Silence -- lack of participation.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Change teaching strategies from group discussion to individual written exercises or a videotape
- Give strong positive reinforcement for any contribution
- Involve by directly asking him/her a question
- Make eye contact
- Appoint to be small group leader

3. **BEHAVIOR:**

Talkativeness -- knowing everything, manipulation, chronic whining.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Acknowledge comments made
- Give limited time to express viewpoint or feelings, and then move on
- Make eye contact with another participant and move toward that person
- Give the person individual attention during breaks
- Say: "That's an interesting point. Now let's see what other people think."

4. **BEHAVIOR:**

Sharpshooting -- trying to shoot you down or trip you up.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Admit that you do not know all the answers and redirect the question the group or the individual who asked it
- Acknowledge that this is a joint learning experience
- Say that you'll will investigate and provide an answer at a later time

5. **BEHAVIOR:**

Heckling/Arguing -- disagreeing with everything you say; making personal attacks.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Redirect question to group or supportive individuals
- Recognize participant's feelings and move one
- Acknowledge positive points
- Say: "I appreciate your comments, but I'd like to hear from others," or "It looks like we disagree."

6. **BEHAVIOR:**

Grandstanding -- getting caught up in one's own agenda or thoughts to the detriment of other learners.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Say: "You are entitled to your opinion, belief or feelings, but now it's time we moved on to the next subject," or "Can you restate that as a question?" or "We'd like to hear more about that if there is time after the presentation."

7. **BEHAVIOR:**

Overt Hostility/Resistance -- angry, belligerent, combative behavior.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Hostility can be a mask for fear. Reframe hostility as fear to depersonalize it
- Respond to fear, not hostility
- Remain calm and polite - keep your temper in check
- Don't disagree, but build on or around what has been said
- Move closer to the hostile person, maintain eye contact
- Always allow him or her a way to gracefully retreat from the confrontation
- Say: "You seem really angry. Does anyone else feel this way?" Solicit peer pressure
- Allow individual to solve the problem being addressed. He or she may not be able to offer solutions and will sometimes undermine his or her own position.
- Ignore behavior
- Talk to him or her privately during a break
- As a last resort, privately ask the individual to leave class for the good of the group

8. **BEHAVIOR:**

Griping -- maybe legitimate complaining.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Point out that we can't change policy here
- Validate his/her point
- Indicate you'll discuss the problem with the participant privately
- Indicate time pressure

9. **BEHAVIOR:**

Side Conversations -- may be related to subject or personal. Distracts group members and you.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Don't embarrass talkers
- Ask their opinion on topic being discussed
- Ask talkers if they would like to share their ideas
- Casually move toward those talking
- Make eye contact with them.
- Comment on the group (but don't look at them "one-at-a-time")
- Standing near the talkers, ask a near-by participant a question so that the new discussion is near the talkers
- As a last resort, stop and wait